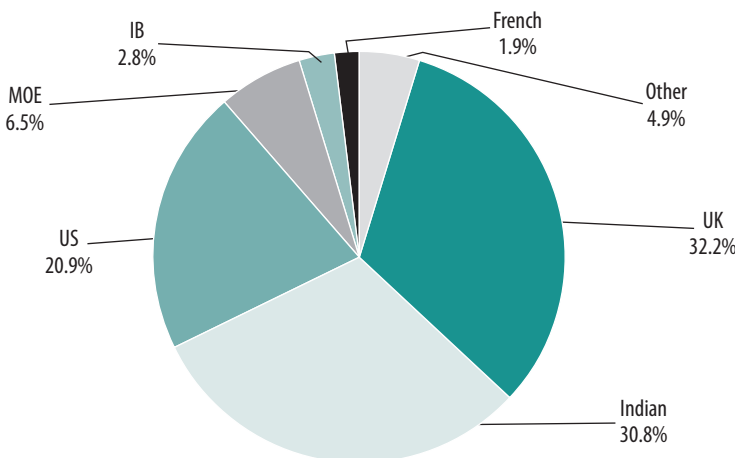


Introduction

As Dubai has grown over the last two decades, the demand for private education has grown with it, a reflection of the number of expatriates settling in the city. Today, 88% of all students attend private schools. The surge in demand over this period had in fact been so significant that authorities, recognizing the need to establish a specific governmental entity to oversee the sector’s expansion, moved to create the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2007.¹ Given the city-state’s unique context (in which a majority of the population are expatriates, not Emiratis), the immediate challenge for this new *public* institution was to identify an appropriate approach for regulating a *private* education sector. About that time, the *Road Not Traveled* (2008), the World Bank’s Education Flagship for the Middle East North Africa, was published. It put forward the hypothesis that education systems in the Region could be improved by promoting better governance, the idea being that effective

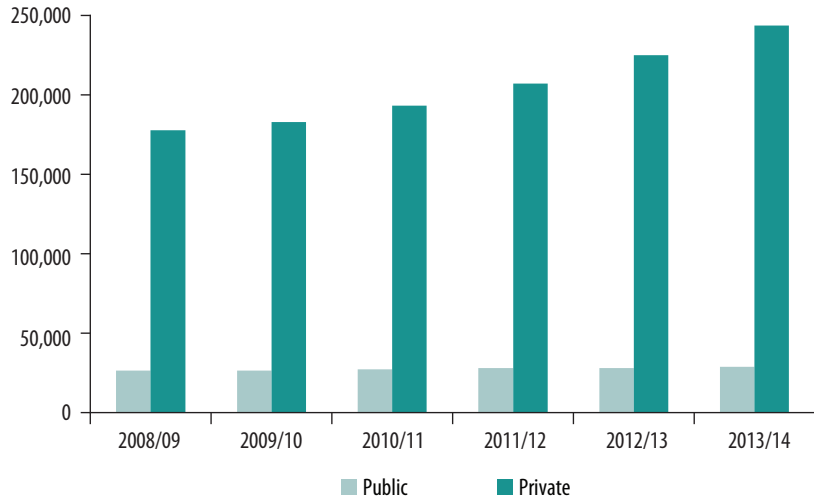
FIGURE 1

Students by Type of School 2013/14



Source: KHDA, March 2014.

FIGURE 2

Growth of Public and Private Enrolment in Dubai (2008–2014)

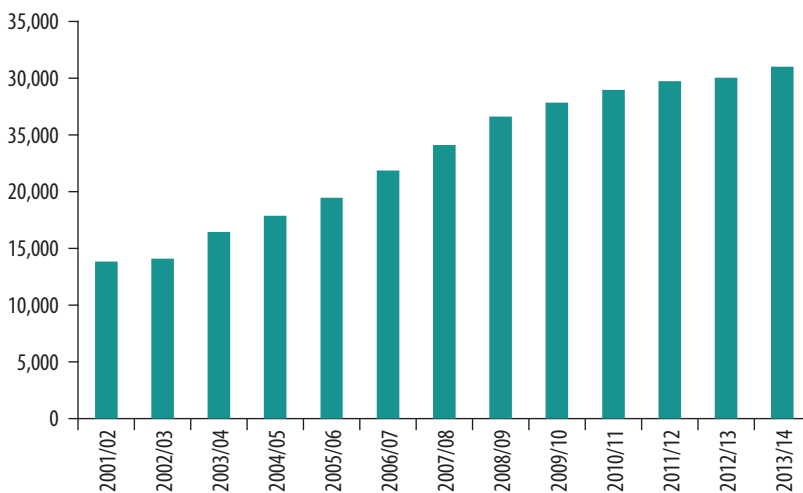
Source: Figures provided by KHDA March 2014.

and efficient national policies, programs and services require the improved interaction between government and constituents based on transparency, accountability and participation. It was the central tenets of this approach, dependent essentially on oversight rather than intervention, which appealed to the KHDA and so the policy framework from that report was adopted, adapted, and put into place in Dubai.

Now, some five years later, the KHDA has returned to the World Bank requesting a review of these governance initiatives. A World Bank team, working in close collaboration with counterparts in the KHDA, has now completed that review and their findings are presented in this report.

Today, Dubai's private school students (both Emiratis and non-Emiratis) are enrolled in 158 private schools offering a mix of 15 different curricula including for example the Indian, UK, US, UAE, International Baccalaureate, Pakistani, and others. The share of students in private education has been increasing steadily (fig.2)—a trend which is perhaps most surprising for Emirati students (fig.3)—and will likely continue to remain constant, as private school student numbers in Dubai are increasing at a long-term annual rate now estimated at between 7 and 8 per cent.² In the meantime, Dubai's participation in TIMSS and PIRLS 2011³ showed that although student learning was higher than other participating MENA countries, it was below the international average in grades 4 and 8 in mathematics and science and in reading in grade 4. The results also showed that there was wide variation and disparity across schools offering

FIGURE 3

Emiratis in Dubai Private Schools (2001–2014)

Source: KHDA March 2014.

different curricula and between public and private schools. These results were similar, too, for PISA⁴ scores for 15 year olds. Quality, in other words, could be improved in the sub-sector.

Ensuring that children in Dubai have access to high quality educational institutions and that they graduate with the knowledge and skills needed for their active participation in a high-value, knowledge-driven economy are two strategic impulses guiding the education initiatives of the KHDA in support of the Dubai Strategic Plan 2015.

The main objective of the present review is to understand what has motivated KHDA's policy initiatives, what principles have guided design, how they were operationalized, and how they function in real life situations today. In what follows, we look first at the broader context of the issue by giving a brief overview of (i) the growth of private sector education and (ii) the rise of public governance reform initiatives in the global education policy agenda. We then turn to the case of Dubai: we present the argument in *The Road Not Traveled* before reviewing how that policy framework was translated into its present institutional configuration in Dubai through the development of the institutions that came into being. We then reflect on the policy framework in operation, showing how the constituent components function together. We end by suggesting some options on potential ways forward that would further enhance the system.

Endnotes

1. The Ministry of Education of the UAE remains in charge of the public provision of education.
2. Estimate from KHDA
3. TIMSS stands for *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*. It is an internationally comparative assessment of student learning in mathematics and science for students around the world which provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time. It is carried out every four years in Grades 4 and 8. PIRLS stands for *Progress of International Reading and Literacy Study* and is conducted every five years on Grade 4 students.
4. The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. To date, students representing more than 70 economies have participated in the assessment.